

MUSIC AND THE MOVIES

by: Ed Lettner of The Music Studio



The Academy Awards provide a reminder of the important role music plays in movies. Watch any Alfred Hitchcock or Star Wars film, for example, and you will hear and feel the effect of film music.

The term 'movie soundtrack' is divided into three categories: A film score soundtrack consists of the original background music written for a movie (Star Wars); a musical film soundtrack concentrates on songs written for a movie (Grease); and a pop song soundtrack features previously recorded songs (When Harry Met Sally).

All movie soundtracks trace their roots back to the worlds of opera, musical theatre, vaudeville and late nineteenth-century concert music. Birth of a Nation (1915) was one of the first movies to feature music, in this case a score comprised of classical and popular music. Music for the early silent movies was performed live by an in-house pianist or organist, and sometimes by an orchestra. In addition to accompanying the film, the music also masked the noise of the early film projectors. Typically, musicians would perform music by famous composers chosen from film music catalogues that were organized according to mood or style.

Talking pictures, beginning with The Jazz Singer in 1927, featured the first soundtracks that were recorded as part of the film and were often written by classically trained European composers. This was followed by The Golden Age of Hollywood from 1933 to 1956. This period of film scoring introduced new influences such as jazz. The great era of American songwriting occurred during this time and songwriters such as Irving Berlin and George Gershwin also composed film music. European composers such as Wolfgang Korngold continued to make contributions to the evolving genre of soundtrack composition. Today, composers such as John Williams (Star Wars) carry on the tradition of early movie composers of writing orchestral soundtracks. Other notable contemporary film composers include Torontonians Howard Shore (The Lord of the Rings) and Danny Elfman (Batman).

So the next time you watch a movie, have your ears and your eyes wide open.

Ed Lettner owns The Music Studio in Etobicoke, which has offered music instruction since 1990. He is an honours graduate of the Humber College Institute of Technology music program. Ed enjoys watching and listening to a wide variety of movies. For information about the programs at The Music Studio, please call 416-234-9268, email ed@themusicstudio.ca or visit www.themusicstudio.ca